

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Understanding Who WE Are

by Dr. Edward Hoffman



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Edward Hoffman is

Director of the NASA Academy of Program and Project Leadership. He is responsible for the development of program and project leaders and teams within NASA. Dr. Hoffman develops training curricula, consulting services, research projects and special studies in program and project management. . You can contact him at ehoffman@hq.nasa.gov

The path to greatness is along with others.

Baltasar Gracian, *Oracular Manual*

Some things at NASA were simpler years ago. In project terms, the “team” meant the NASA civil service team. Now the NASA project team is sometimes only a few civil service members, supplemented by a far larger contractor workforce. In fact, under the era of smaller is better, the project team includes multiple industry players, international partners, several NASA centers and university-led missions. You really have to keep a scorecard to know all the players.

This evolution has caught all of us by surprise. Just the other night, I was talking with a NASA project management class about the things we must do to increase the likelihood of mission success. Then the realization came booming down, every one in the classroom was a NASA civil servant (along with several participants from other government agencies), which is typically only about 10% of a project team. Sadly, the other people who make up the team were not there.

Perhaps you think this is simply a training problem. Alas, based on my experience, it's just as knotty of an issue in other parts of the program world.

Our Agency policy and guidelines document for the management of programs and projects (7120.5a) was written to improve the management of our programs. However, the document addresses only that part of the workforce who are NASA-badged. How much impact can it have on a project when 90% of the team is not the intended audience?

To me it is clear that the time has come to consider redefining who the WE are on a project team. Let the WE be consistent with what we all know that it connotes. Perhaps the agents of change who have promoted the present environment can assist us by rethinking the stupid policies and regulations that make partnering so difficult. (How many of you have noticed the number of rules that make working across organizational lines so frustrating?)

Reading through the stories in this issue, I am comforted by the fact that there are outstanding project leaders and team members within NASA who are successfully dealing with the de facto WE of a project team. Clearly, in these examples the project leader has embraced the role of partnering and sought common sense and creative ways to work together effectively. The starting point seems to be acknowledging the new nature of working with others – understanding who WE are – and then moving from there to form a great team.